

**Written Testimony for the
Little Hoover Commission Hearing on Teacher Quality/Workforce**

**Harold Boger, Teacher
Crenshaw LEARN Charter HS, LAUSD**

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My name is Harold Boger and I am a teacher at the Crenshaw LEARN Charter Senior High School. Crenshaw is a comprehensive high school with two magnet programs located in southwest Los Angeles in the Los Angeles Unified School District. It has an enrollment of approximately 2700 students. I have been teaching there for the past 13 years and am currently the mathematics department chairperson. The name of our school alone implies that Crenshaw has participated in many different school improvement programs. As a leader at the school, I have participated in the implementation of nearly every one of these programs.

I would like to thank you for inviting me to speak at this hearing. I, along with many of my colleagues, feel that the voice of the classroom teacher gets forgotten when education policy is established. Lately there have been numerous new initiatives designed to improve the educational system. I think that it is abundantly clear that Governor Davis is committed to using the resources of this state to improve student achievement. Without sounding ungrateful, sometimes it is hard to keep track of what's going on because it seems as if a new initiative is announced each week. As I was preparing for this testimony, I became somewhat paralyzed in my ability to focus on which initiatives I felt would be most beneficial. I then realized that my answer to one question would answer the question of how beneficial any of these initiatives will be without my having to address each initiative individually.

The question is **Why should I, as a classroom teacher, care about any of these initiatives?** It might make more sense if I reword this question and ask **Why should anyone believe that any of these initiatives are going to have a significant impact on what I do on a daily basis as a teacher?**

In answering this question, let me start by telling you that I am a fully credentialed math teacher who is at the top of the pay scale and who, regardless of how many different organizations create and reword mathematical standards, has a good mastery of my subject area. At a minimum I have 15 more years to work in this profession before I am eligible to retire with benefits. Given that I acknowledge that I have a moral obligation to perform my job competently, what incentive do I have to go beyond simply providing my students the *opportunity* to learn and instead to take on the added responsibility of *ensuring* that my students learn?

Presently, I am required to arrive at my worksite by 7:50 am and not leave before 3:20 p.m. Within that time I teach five classes and am expected to make sure that I have two graded assignments for each student each week. It's expected that I show some type of evidence of lesson planning but I have a great deal of autonomy in deciding daily lessons. I am contractually obligated to attend a one hour faculty meeting twice

a month. In addition I do need to provide the state with evidence of 150 hours of professional development activities each five years in order to renew my credential.

I mentioned before that I was at the top of the teacher pay scale. In my district the salary schedule is a two dimensional array with number of years worked as one of the variables and numbers of semester units earned after receiving a bachelor's degree as the other. What I find astounding about this whole process is that my salary increases never once depended upon any evaluation of my teaching ability beyond that of having satisfied my minimal contractual obligations. This policy alone symbolizes the value placed on good instructional practices.

Does the governor's rewards for teachers address this issue? Not really.

\$ Many teachers are insulted by these rewards

\$ Raising API scores requires school-wide effort. Who will lead the effort (an added responsibility) given that the outcome is in doubt?

\$ National Board Certification increases the skill level of individual teachers but does not advance the need for school-wide improvement

I've given you reasons as to why I don't think that the current educational initiatives are going to have a significant impact on the instructional practices of an experienced teacher. I could have gone through this litany of reasons from the perspective of a new teacher and still reached the same conclusion that these initiatives will aid in helping to expand the *opportunity* for our children to have access to a quality education but that they fall very short of *ensuring* that they will.

Career Ladder

I think that if I can give you one possible example of how the system might be improved, I will be able to help shed some light on some other deficiencies of the current initiatives. I strongly believe that some type of career ladder for teachers is long overdue. Careful thought would need to be given to how it was designed, but I basically envision a career ladder that has 3 different stages.

Stage 1- Novice Teacher

\$ Full time teacher

\$ Some will have a credential before being hired and others will be in an intern program which is administered in conjunction with the department head at the school site.

\$ All novice teachers are closely supervised by department head

\$ Department head is instrumental in coordinating professional development activity needs of individuals in conjunction with needs of school

\$ Phase ends when teacher becomes National Board Certified. Teachers who do not achieve this status within a certain time frame will be dismissed.

Stage 2 - Experienced Teacher

- \$ full time teacher
- \$ mentor teacher for beginning teacher
- \$ participates in professional development activities coordinated with department head who approves salary points for participation.
- \$ eventually begins to facilitate professional development networks
- \$ gathers experience to become an instructional leader
- \$ Phase ends when teacher earns a Doctor of Education from a program that emphasizes
 - < ability to conduct action research studies
 - < educational leadership
 - < subject matter and pedagogical expertise in at least one field
 - < field work supervised by department head

Stage 3 - Instructional Leader/Department Head

Instructional Leader - Teacher

- \$ full time teacher
- \$ mentor teacher for beginning teacher
- \$ coordinate school-wide special projects, paid on a contracted basis (i.e. Testing Coordinator, WASC reports)
- \$ conduct action research studies on special projects
- \$ responsible for at least one professional development network

Instructional Leader - Department Head

A department head is an instructional leader who has been hired to manage an instructional department.

- \$ must teach at least 50% of an experienced teacher assignment
- \$ accountable for all students progress of departmental standards
- \$ evaluates all teachers in department
- \$ assigns all teaching assignments for department
- \$ organizes professional development activities for teachers in department and approves salary credits
- \$ along with principal and other department heads is part of the school's instructional leadership team
- \$ works closely with university faculty and other educational organizations in developing professional development activities
- \$ responsible for action research studies for the department
- \$ compensation comparable to school principal

Professional Development

The main purpose of the career ladder is to facilitate what I consider to be the most important institutional change needed - the nature of professional development. The creation of professional development networks at school sites would allow teachers= professional learning to be combined with their teaching duties. Networks are flexible enough to adapt to the immediate professional needs of the participants and yet when properly facilitated are able to stay focused. Participants usually meet between 2-4 hours per month, but are able to quickly adapt to meet the needs and schedules of its participants. Because networks are on-going activities and teachers discuss issues in a collegial atmosphere, teachers are more motivated to implement changes in their instructional practice. Network activities promote critical thinking in teachers. This is important because if teachers aren't engaged in critical thinking, then how can we expect them to value critical thinking skills in their students.

Example of a Professional Development Network:

Let's say that a school (or a consortium of schools) has a network of algebra teachers. This year this network of teachers could decide that they want to study whether manipulatives have a positive effect on student learning. This group of teachers would discuss various teaching strategies that they could use. They would devise an instructional plan, use it in class, and reflect upon its effects. They would publish their study, having made a significant contribution to the body of acceptable instructional practices by supporting their findings with the outcome of student work. Having monitored the work of the network, the department head would grant salary credit for participation.

How does this differ from our current system?

- \$ individual teachers attend one-time workshops which are not necessarily directly related to their job
- \$ professional learning is not on-going
- \$ not related to student outcomes
- \$ no time is given to put into practice what was learned at the workshop
- \$ no time is given to share information in a meaningful way with colleagues
- \$ professional learning is usually passive learning
- \$ salary credits can be granted if the workshop has enough in seat hours.

Hard-to-Staff Schools

A career ladder will encourage experienced teachers to accept challenges at traditionally hard to staff schools. As departments start to adopt teaching philosophies teachers will seek to work in schools which complement their skills. In addition, just as in any labor market, teachers will transfer schools to take advantage of new opportunities.

Principal Shortage

There are many new proposals suggesting a need for professional development for principals. Even though in theory this sounds great, it misses the fundamental understanding that no matter how skilled the principal, he/she is at the mercy of cooperative teachers. The system I propose treats principals as managers and

gives them an organization to manage. A model which infers that the principal will be the sole instructional leader at a school is not realistic because it requires the principal to be an instructional expert in too many different fields. Under the system I propose, not only would outstanding department heads make for good candidates for the principalship, but also, people from other occupations that have had good managerial training.

Models Sound Educational Theory

Under the present system, principals are trained to evaluate teaching. This has the effect of making principals very knowledgeable about effective teaching practices even though they may never teach a class again. By teachers becoming experts in recognizing effective practices, they are much more likely to internalize and actively use this knowledge in their own practice. This follows the axiom that if you want to learn something well then teach someone else.

The career ladder and professional development model that I propose meets the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium's criteria for what constitutes quality professional development because it:

- \$ validates teaching and learning as the central activities of the school
- \$ engages all school leaders in well-planned; integrated, career-long learning to improve student achievement
- \$ promotes collaboration to achieve organizational goals while meeting individual needs
- \$ models effective learning processes; and
- \$ incorporates measures of accountability that direct attention to valued learning outcomes.

I believe that our current system of professional development does not meet this criteria. With our current system, the best that one can hope for is to improve a flawed model. In so doing, if we are lucky, we can increase the opportunities for students to receive a quality education. But I ask once more, ~~A~~If I believe that I'm already providing my students with these opportunities, then why are these new initiatives going to have the effect of changing what I do?@ For me, I will probably stop trying to *ensure* that my students learn, if I continue to feel that I am not trusted enough to take on that responsibility.